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ABSTRACT

During the heightened self-consciousness of adolescence, reevaluation and modifications in self-perceptions and sex-role orientations generally take place. Therefore, a developmental perspective is needed to investigate the adoption of sex-typed, cross sex-typed, or non sex-typed attitudes and behaviors. Young women (N=226) responded to a longitudinal study by completing the Bem Sex Role Inventory and the Assessment of Career Decision-Making. In addition to information concerning sex-role attributions, data were obtained to assess progress in making career decisions and styles involved in such decision-making. Although no relationships were found between any sex-role variables and career progress scores, these self-attributions were related to decision-making styles. A rational style was characteristic of masculine and androgynous subjects, while feminine and undifferentiated subjects were similar in their preference for a dependent mode. The relationship between style scores and masculinity or femininity scores surfaced by the senior year in high school. The predictability of career decision-making styles from the masculinity component was observed. (Author/NRB)

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SEX ROLES AND CAREER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN YOUNG WOMEN

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Sex Roles and Career Decision-Making Process in Young Women

Janet L. Sola

ABSTRACT

Two hundred twenty-six young women responded to a longitudinal study by completing the BSRI and the Assessment of Career Decision-Making (ACDM). In addition to information concerning sex-role attributions, data were obtained assessing progress in making career decisions and styles involved in this process. Results provided insight into the significant relationship between self-attribution of instrumental characteristics and aspects of career choice implementation. Although no relationships were found between any sex-role variables and career progress scores, these self-attributions did relate to decision-making styles. A rational style was characteristic of masculine and androgynous subjects, while feminine and undifferentiated were similar in their preference of a dependent mode. The relationship between style scores and masculinity or femininity scores surfaced by the senior year in high school. Predictability of career decision-making styles only from the masculinity component was observed. Implications for career planning in women during late adolescence and early adulthood were noted.

Traditionally labeled feminine and masculine psychological orientations, for a long while narrowly defined and considered mutually exclusive, are now recognized as being essentially orthogonal constructs. Although representing separate dimensions of behavior and thought, their availability and acceptability for anyone is widely emphasized in recent literature. Individual differences are found, however, in the extent to which both of these clusters of characteristics are incorporated into the personality structure and patterns of behavior. Bakan (1966) conceptualized the expressive orientations and goal-directed, instrumental actions as 'fundamental modalities' of all living beings. Implied in this concept is that mature, effective functioning necessitates achieving a balanced integration of these orientations.

Developmentally, the establishment of one's sex-role orientation begins with early conformity to and internalization of highly differentiated external standards (Block, 1973). Adolescence provides fertile ground for the continuing development of an autonomous, individualized orientation. It is a significant period of identity formation (Erikson, 1963), a turning point characterized by uniquely difficult growth and adjustment challenges. Sex role requirements are augmented at this time within the context of qualitatively differentheterosexual relationshps, eliciting reciprocal roles (Churnin-Nash, 1979). New conflicts and tasks arise (changed peer and sexual relationships, occupational responsibilities, increasing independence from parents), influencing the establishment of a clear conception of one's self and one's roles, as well as an effective transcendence and integration of traditional sex roles.

Research literature concerning sex roles has been largely restricted to investigating its relationship to (1) personality variables, (2) emotional adjustment and (3) influences on behavioral measures assessed in the laboratory (Kaplan and Sedney, 1980; Bem and Lenney, 1976; Bem, Martyna, and Watson, 1976). Gender comparisons have also been

frequently reported (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). These studies have primarily targeted college populations or young children as subjects, at one limited time of measurement. However, a static measure of sex roles and their potential influences is not sufficient. The incorporation of characteristics such as assertiveness, emotionality, dominance, and cheerfulness, for example, is a complex phenomenon that occurs over a number of years in a continually developing identity structure.

The present study was initially begun to assess the self-attributions made during the course of the high school years and has extended to the immediate post-high school experience. This is the time for rapidly changing environmental experiences, expectations, and conflicts as society begins to view the child as an adolescent and subsequently as a responsible young adult. With the heightened self-consciousness of this period (Elkind, 1967), it is likely that reevaluation and modifications in self-perceptions and sex role orientations will accompany these experiences. Therefore, a developmental perspective was considered imperative when investigating the adoption of sex-typed, cross sex-typed, or non sex-typed attitudes and behaviors.

Obviously, the possibility of sex role development during this time does not take place in a vacuum. Significant normative experiences during a particular segment of the life cycle, can be hypothesized to play a significant role. Any discontinuity of status, of life style, or in societal pressures will require readjustment. One 'universal' and discontinuous event at this time involves vocational or occupational choice and preparation. During the high school years, adolescents are encouraged and expected to consider future careers, college choices, family responsibilities, etc. It is likely that sex role orientation will be one major influence on the types of decisions made, the progress made in the process, as well as on the strategy used when making such life plans. An interaction will likely occur here, however. Once a decision is made, a career begun, and new experiences encountered that are largely defined by that particular choice, individual sex role orientations might be modified or crystallized even further. For example, suppose that an adolescent has chosen to take a vocational training class

in her senior year, designed to provide know'edge of and experience in secretarial work. Reasons for opting for such a career track are numerous, of course, but once she settles into a related position in the work force, options for behavior will be reduced. She may encounter expectations for traditional sex typed behaviors, reinforcing those she already exhibits. What is more, rewards, encouragement, and models of 'masculine' behaviors and characteristics may be limited. Therefore, choices during adolescence and late adolescence could narrow or broaden the repertoire of available behaviors.

This process of career development can be viewed in terms of psychological stages, with particular problems facing the individual at each stage (Tiedeman and O'Hara,1963). As each career decision-making task is effectively resolved, the control one has over her or his behavior and environment is enhanced (Harren, Kass, Tinsley, and Moreland, 1978, 1979). This increases the feeling of agency and responsibility for making and carrying out career decisions. The model proposed by Tiedeman and O'Hara (1963) defines this progression in terms of seven stages, four of which are anticipatory with the last three being implementation stages. The anticipatory stages include: exploration, crystallization, choice, and clarification tasks. Upon making a commitment to a particular goal and clarifying the consequences of that commitment, implementation of these decisions occurs. The process continues with the stages of induction, reformation, and integration. As progress is made along this continuum, tasks require greater activity, assertiveness, independence, and knowledge of self, many qualities frequently associated with masculine sex role standards (Moreland, Harren, Krimsky-Montague, and Tinsley, 1979).

Progression towards implementation of a realistic and desired career is additionally inflenced by the manner with which one chooses. That is, the cognitive strategies employed by an individual will make any choice personally successful or unsuccessful. Harren (1978) has categorized three of the most frequently used decision-making styles and has developed a test for their assessment. These three are based upon the degree of personal responsibility taken with respect to decision-making and the amount of logic used in this strategy. The most effective style of the three is termed 'rational', a

logical, deliberate, active, and prepared mode. It is predicted that those who rely on this style will progress more readily along the career path when compared with those using primarily the other two modes: intuitive and dependent. Individuals employing an intuitive style, while accepting responsibility for decisions, use an emotional basis and attend to feelings in the selection process. A career or job 'feels right' to the individual. For example, a woman may feel as though she should be a physician, the idea being emotionally appealing to her. Her decision is not based upon thorough consideration of capabilities and job requirements. Persons characterized by a dependent syle, on the other hand, thrust responsibility outside themselves, are passive and compliant, and in need of social acceptability. Low occupational satisfaction and success are frequent accompaniments of such a strategy (Harren, 1978).

It becomes apparent when evaluating these strategies that a rational style incorporates behaviors and characteristics common to the 'masculine' dimension of personality (e.g. analytical tendencies, logical thought, assertive and self-confident behaviors). Therefore, high levels of masculinity should be related to the employment of such a style. If this is the case, that rational strategies facilitate making successful, mature vocational choices, it follows that the masculinity component of an individual's personality should also be predictive of progress along this career continuum.

With these considerations in mind, the present study was formulated to provide answers to numerous questions regarding (a) sex role orientation and (b) vocational decision-making in young women during significant growth years. The focus of this paper revolved around the following hypotheses:

A. Career Progress (DMT:0).

1) Masculinity scores obtained during the late adolescent/early adulthood period were hypothesized to be significantly predictive of the level of progress made in career decision-making. This was predicated on the basis that those who have advanced furthest with regards to occupational choice and implementation would be those who attribute high levels of achievement strivings, independent and instrumental behaviors to themselves (as reflected in high BSRI masculinity scores). Conversely, an insignificant

relationship between these career progress indications and femininity scores was predicted. The assumption was that movement in the direction of career implementation would be less likely to be related to self-attributions of the feminine, expressive characteristics than to the instrumental. The ability to be expressive, sensitive, tender, for example, was not expected to impede progress, rather to have little or no predictability of successful movement along this dimension.

It follows that women classified as masculine and androgynous, being high on this instrumental component, would be expected to be further advanced regarding career choices than feminine or undifferentiated subjects. This was also assessed in the present study.

2)Masculinity and femininity scores obtained during the high school years were hypothesized to have low, insignificant predictability of these same career progress scores, obtained two to five years following the completion of high school. During the formative adolescent years, sex role orientations are as yet unstable, not firmly crystallized or incorporated into the personality structure (Sola and Phye, 1979). Therefore, expectations were that long range predictability of career progress from high school masculinity and/or femininity scores would be minimal.

B. Decision-Making Styles.

1) The final hypotheses predicted that decision-making styles would be related to sex role orientations of early adulthood. An individual of an intuitive style uses present feelings and emotional self-awareness as a basis for occupational decisions. Predominant use of a rational decision-making style entails logical, deliberate, and independent bahavior and thought. Subjects categorized as feminine (at the early adulthood measurement) were predicted to use a dependent style more frequently than were masculine or androgynous individuals. These latter groups were hypothesized to more readily use a rational decision-making style. Since a dependent style incorporates expectations and desires of others, greater passivity and compliance, it may be, in the long-run ineffective. Feminine subjects have been shown to display less effective, greater levels of dependent behaviors on a variety of tasks (Bem, 1974). Thus, contrasted with the

more effective, achievement oriented masculine or androgynous individuals, expectations were that feminine women would use a dependent style of decision-making to a greater extent.

2) In addition to these expectations of differences due to classification, questions existed concerning the influence of the specific components of such sex role ascriptions. Predictions were that the stereotypically masculine component of personality (measured during the most recent testing period) would be predictive of the strategies most frequently used. Also, since recent literature has suggested that sex role orientations may have low stability during high school, no relationship was presumed to exist between either masculineor feminine scores obtained during middle adolescence and mode of thought characterizing their later adolescent years.

METHOD

Subjects. All subjects in the present study were participants in a previous study investigating short term development of sex-role orientations as adolescents progress through high school. This original study was conducted between 1974 and 1977, while the women were enrolled fulltime in a public high school in a medium-sized Midwestern city. At the time of this prior study, subjects were in either their sophomore, junior, or senior year.

For the present follow-up study, parents' addresses were obtained for 600 of the original subjects. Questionnaires were sent to this group of women. Two hundred twenty-six returned completed protocols. In the present study, 36 were from the 1975 graduating class, 46 from 1976, 54 from 1977, 57 from 1978, and 33 were 1979 graduating seniors. Subjects were in a variety of colleges, college majors, and occupations at this time of measurement, and no distinctions were made in the present study between women based upon goals, choices, or cohorts.

Instrumentation. Two instruments were mailed to all subjects, providing data for the present study. These were the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) and the Assessment of Career Decision-Making (ACDM). (a) The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). This instrument is a self-rating inventory measuring the self-attributed characteristics of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Sixty Likert-type items comprise this scale, including equal numbers of instrumental (masculine), expressive (feminine), and neutral adjectives. For each adjective, Subjects rated themselves on a scale of 1(never or almost never true) to 7(always or almost always true). This instrument treats masculinity and femininity as orthogonal dimensions, as opposed to opposite poles of a uni-dimensional continuum. Therefore, each received a score reflecting both orientations. Based upon these measurements, the women could also be categorized in one of four groups. Subjects whose femininity score was above the group mean ($\overline{X}$ = 5.15) and whose masculinity score was below the group mean ($\overline{X}$ = 4.87) were classified as feminine. Masculine individuals were above the masculinity mean while below the mean on the femininity scale. If a respondent scored high on both dimensions, she was categorized as androgynous, while low scorers were

considered undifferentiated with respect to sex role orientation.

(b) Assessment of Career Decision-Making (ACDM). The ACDM is a four part questionnaire developed by Harren (1978), measuring career decisions based upon Tiedeman and O'Hara's seven stage model (1963). It assesses decision-making progress for three major decisions: selection of a college, choice of an academic major, and occupational choice. For the present study, only the occupational scale was administered, since it was considered appropriate for both college and non-college bound subjects. In this portion, 40 items assessed progress through the career development model, reflecting advancement through the first four anticipatory stages involved in vocational choice.

Information was also provided by the ACDM concerning use of three decision making strategies. The degree to which an individual projects responsibility for decisions outward (e.g. towards authority, peers, fate) and the degree to which an individual uses emotional versus logical strategies in this process were assessed. Thirty items comprised this portion and indicated which of the three styles is used most frequently in such a task, the rational, intuitive, or dependent mode. A proportion score was computed for each style to represent degree of reliance on that particular mode relative to the other two.

Therefore, for each subject, data were obtained on the following variables: masculinity and femininity scores, a classification based upon these scores, a career progress score (DMT:0), and proportion scores for each of three decision-making modes.

Procedure. For the initial study, data were obtained during fall and spring of each academic year for a three year period, beginning in 1974. BSRI measurements were obtained for the sophomore, junior, and senior classes (females only) with each individual taking the inventory during at least one time of measurement. Some subjects took the test once in this three year period, while others took it up to six times, depending upon availability. Therefore, a variable number of subjects completed test protocols at any one time of measurement in this initial testing period. The BSRI was administered in groups in a large, quiet auditorium. Testing monitors were available to answer any questions concerning procedure and/or definitions of adjectives.

In the present study, contact was made by mail. Addresses of parents were obtained through listings provided by the high school, and were confirmed through the most recently published telephone directory of the city. From the original sample population, six hundred packets of materials were mailed. Included in these mailings were a cover letter, a page of questions asking for demographic and attitudinal information, the BSRI, the ACDM, and a stamped return envelope. Two hundred twenty-six women responded to the study, for a 38% return rate.

RESULTS

A. Career Progess and Masculine and Feminine Attributions.

Hypotheses regarding predictability of career progress from the two discrete components measured by the BSRI were not supported by results of the present study. Separate multiple regression analyses were conducted, with predictor variables defined as the masculinity and femininity scores obtained for sophomores, juniors, and seniors in high school, as well as the scores obtained (by mail) during the most current time of measurement. The criterion variable in each of these analyses was the career progress (DMT:O) score. Contrary to predictions, all analyses were insignificant, indicating that no relationship existed between present or prior BSRI masculinity or femininity scores and progress at late adolescence in occupational decision-making. It is possible that failure to account for age or cohort differences reduced the probability of finding such a relationship, however.

B. Decision-making Styles and Sex Role Orientation.

1) To assess the hypotheses concerning the existence of a relationship between present classification by sex role orientation and career variables, individual one-way analyses of variance were conducted. Based upon BSRI data obtained during Fall, 1979, four levels of the independent variable, sex role orientation, were delineated. Fifty-seven women were considered masculine, 66 were feminine, 57 scored as androgynous, while 35 were undifferentiated. The dependent variables consisted of: three decision-making style proportions and career progress, as reflected in DMT:O scores. Results indicated that career progress means did not differ based upon sex role classification.

However, use of a particular decision-making strategy did prove to be related to such categorization. Significant main effects were found for this variable when analyses of variance were performed on two of the dependent variables: the rational as well as the dependent ACDM scores ($F_{3,210} = 5.53$, $p < .01$ and $F_{3,210} = 6.31$, $p < .01$, respectively). Tukey's HSD post hoc analyses indicated that masculine and androgynous subjects showed significantly greater use of a rational decision-making style, while a dependent style was the preponderant mode for feminine and undifferentiated women. Scores were highly similar for the masculine and androgynous groups and between undifferentiated and feminine subjects on these dependent variables. No difference between groups was noted for the intuitive mode scores. See Table 1 for means and standard deviations.

2) Fall, 1979 data analyses: In multiple regression analyses, current masculinity and femininity scores were considered predictor variables of current styles of vocational decision-making. The proportion of dependent responses was regressed onto masculinity and femininity scores, revealing a highly significant relationship ($F_{2,214} = 20.55$, $p < .001$). The direction of this relationship revealed that low proportions of a dependent strategy were associated with high masculinity scores. Femininity scores had no association with this style of responding for either longitudinal or current analyses.

Likewise, the multiple regression analysis which regressed a rational mode onto these masculinity and femininity scores was highly significant ($F_{2,214} = 13.76$, $p < .001$). The greater the self attribution of masculine characteristics, the higher the proportion of rational responses on the ACDM. Femininity scores again had no relationship to this mode of responding. No significant predictability from BSRI scores was found for the intuitive mode of responding.

3) Longitudinal predictions. Masculinity and femininity BSRI scores obtained from subjects during their high school years were predictor variables in comparable multiple regression analyses. Results revealed that until the senior year measurement period, no significant relationship existed between decision-making styles and sex role orientations. However, significant relationships were obtained during fall and spring data collection periods for subjects in their senior year of high school. When a dependent

strategy was regressed onto these senior year masculinity and femininity scores, significance resulted ($F_{2,114} = 6.24$, $p \leq .001$ and $F_{2,62} = 3.36$, $p \leq .05$, respectively). For both times of measurement, high adolescent masculinity scores were associated with a low proportion of dependent responses on the ACDM during the post high school assessment period. Therefore, from a longitudinal perspective, predictability of decision-making styles from sex role attributions did not occur until the final year of high school.

DISCUSSION

Ideas for the present study came from frequent contact with young women, who were simultaneously exploring career options as well as developing a consistent understanding of who they are relative to societal sex role prescriptions. Obvious differences appeared in the ways they would approach and make choices, avail themselves of new options and experiences, and in their successful and satisfying progress in terms of careers, educational goals, etc. The present study provided information concerning the interface between sex role orientation and vocational choice, salient concerns at this time in one's life cycle.

Hypotheses concerning career progress and styles used in career choice were based upon the assumption that these variables would be mediated by sex role variables. In particular, the qulaities most frequently associated with the activity of making career related decisions were presumed to be those which conform to the masculine sex role standards. However, no relationship between career progress and sex role variables was found. These findings are at variance with those of Moreland, et al. (1979) who observed that endorsement of both feminine and masculine qualities were equally and positively predictive of decisional progress scores in college aged women. A social desireability factor was posired to help explain this observed relationship. Results of the present study may be attributable to the failure to group subjects according to and and/or occupational categories. It is possible that career progress and sex role variables are more strongly related at particular points in the life span or for women who have opted for particular career paths.

Also, variance in career progress may be more likely explained by other personality variables uncontrolled for in the present study, such as intelligence, motivation, and interest. Respondents in any longitudinal study may be comparable in ways related to the variable(s) under investigation, overshadowing the influence of sex role orientation. Factors external to the individual (e.g. job opportunities, monetary considerations, societal expectations, pressures, or supports) may also play a more salient role than does sex role in this population.

Because of the presumed high variability during the adolescent years in sex role self concept (Sola and Phye, 1979), longitudinal predictability of strategy use from these characteristics was not expected. For sophomore and junior measurement periods this was the case. However, senior year masculinity scores accounted for a significant portion of the variance in the use of a dependent strategy during late adolescence. It appears that an adolescent who views herself in 'masculine' terms is indirectly preparing the way for predominant use of a responsible, logical strategy for career planning. Although these self-attributions predicted minimal use of a dependent strategy during the early 20's, it did not insure that the most successful strategy would be in full use at that time. What was predictable, however, was the acceptance of responsibility for decision making, rather that taking a passive, compliant, approval-seeking role. Perhaps this is a period of time for significant modifications in both domains, in the crystallization of sex roles as well as in the development of cognitive strategies utilizing the recently acquired abstraction abilities.

This trend continued into later adolescence, with additional relationships observed. Distinctions in preferred mode of occupational decision-making were found for females at the present time of measurement, with masculine and androgynous subjects similar in their rational style and undifferentiated and feminine subjects similar in their use of a dependent mode. Low dependency scores were again associated with high masculinity ratings and endorsement of 'masculine' qualities was predictive of use of a rational cognitive style. The feminine sex role component was unrelated to use of any of the strategies, contrary to hypotheses. Moreland, et al. (1979) suggested that women (and men) may

place increasing weight on emotional, nonrational strategies in decision-making processes as they advance through the college years. A breakdown by age would be necessary to evaluate this, as well as continual assessment throughout the adulthood years.

Some of the explanation for the well-documented achievement 'drop off' for adolescent females may be found by investigating the developing preference for one strategy over another. Kagan and Moss (1962) found that children who were least likely to show IQ increases were those highest in traits of femininity, regardless of gender. Those whose gains were highest were also more emotionally independent. Since during adolescence, males are finally given the green light to achieve in school, to prepare for success in the 'rea' world' (Churnin-Nash, 1979), they may also be encouraged in the employment of effective cognitive strategies.

Campbell and McKain (Churnin-Nash, 1979) found that more women than men decreased in IQ scores during the adolescent years. They also found that those declining were passive, non-assertive types, fulfilling society's standards for females. By failing to incorporate effective cognitive strategies into their characteristic performance, they are not making maximal use of their intellectual capabilities. Counselors and teachers of high school students would be wise to consider this possibility and to focus much of their efforts on the mechanisms influencing choice, not solely on the content of a decision. Systematically weighing new abilities, desires, and needs relative to job demands, possibilities for advancement, and the potential fulfillment of personal requirements is bound to be the most effective strategy. Since it is not until later adolescence that such systematized, abstract thought processes become readily available to an individual (Smart and Smart, 1979), implications for career planning in high school and college are obvious. To insure success and maturity in achieving a good 'match' between person and career, attention should be placed upon the ways in which relevant and irrelevant input are handled. A system to investigate and modify ineffective strategies could be benefically developed by high school and vocational counselors. Kass (1979) has suggested that changes in cognitive style influence changes in sex role orientation which in turn influence the career decision process. This needs further exploration in light of these present

longitudinal findings with subjects of high school age.

In summary, results of the present study must be cautiously interpreted. All data were from self report inventories so that questions must be raised as to how these findings are translated into 'real world' behaviors. Actual choices of college major, careers, etc. must be considered relative to sex roles and the career decision process. Generalizability of these results to adolescent males is questionable due to the differential treatment in school, by society and parents. Therefore, extension of the present study to males is necessary to allow for examination of within and between sex differences. Also, as in all longitudinal studies, subjects who responded to this mail inquiry may differ from those who did not respond. The variables on which they possibly differed may be related to the dependent variables in significant ways. These would include interest in careers, familiarity with such tests or studies, college experiences, time and patience to respond to the rather lengthy tests.

Additionally, although feminine and undifferentiated groups both reported frequent usage of a style characterized as dependent, it can not be assumed that the reasons underlying such use are identical. It may be that feminine women are socialized in the truly 'feminine' sense, dependent on others even to the point where it generalizes to cognitive strategies. Undifferentiated subjects, on the other hand, may rely on others in this domain due to lack of self-confidence or low self esteem (Bem, 1975). It is necessary to make finer distinctions between such groups in future studies. Finally, a relatively small proportion of the variance in decision-making styles is attributable to sex role self concept. Therefore, counselors, researchers, and educators must not lose sight of the varieties of factors not related to sex roles that help or hinder career-related decision.

TABLE 1

Means and standard deviations on the career decision-making style measure by sex role category

SEX ROLE CATEGORY	DECISION-MAKING STYLE		
	Rational	Intuitive	Dependent
Masculine (n=57)	.564 (.173)	.243 (.153)	.193 (.106)
Feminine (n=66)	.470 (.162)	.278 (.140)	.249 (.134)
Androgynous (n=57)	.561 (.159)	.275 (.146)	.165 (.122)
Undifferentiated (n=35)	.469 (.177)	.281 (.157)	.252 (.135)

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